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Freedom Writers' Teacher to Speak at Saint Mary's

By Andrea A. Firth



Erin Gruwell Photo provided

On November 22nd, Erin Gruwell, the teacher on whom the movie *Freedom Writers* is based will speak at Saint Mary's College (SMC) in Moraga as part of the Distinguished Speakers Series. "We are very excited about Erin coming," states Dr. Kathy Perez who is the Director of Teaching Leadership at SMC and who has known Ms. Gruwell for several years. "She is a very inspirational speaker. She puts the heart back into teaching and education," she adds. Gruwell will talk about her passion for teaching and describe how she transformed high risk, struggling students into well read, college-going young men and women. For those who have seen the movie *Freedom Writers*, Perez has one caveat, "As good as Hilary Swank is, Erin is better."

Gruwell's presentation is part of SMC's ongoing Distinguished Speakers Series that is held on selected Saturdays throughout the school year (see sidebar). "The Saturday Seminar series has been conducted for 15 years," states Perez. Although traditionally structured for beginning teachers and their mentors, this year's Series includes speakers that will appeal to a broad audience notes Perez.

Each Seminar starts with a continental breakfast, which is followed by the keynote presentation. Attendees then choose from a variety of topic-specific breakout sessions in which to participate. The morning ends with a buffet lunch. The next seminar in January will feature Mike Geisen, the National Teacher of the Year. Geisen is an innovative middle school teacher who uses music and technology to humor and motivate students. Comedian and author Michael Pritchard will speak in February followed by author Jo Gusman who will discuss teaching English language learners.

Further information on the Distinguished Speakers Series can be found at

<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/schools/school-of-education/> or by calling (925) 631-4811.

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